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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 04/19/07

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3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, April 18

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 19, 2007

09:47
Arrived at Kantei.

10:15
Met Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process Arima, Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka, and Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau Director General Okuda.

11:02
Met Harvard University Professor Emeritus Peter Ashton and other Japan Prize winners.

12:00
Met New Komeito leader Ota, followed by Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjuro and others. Afterward met Internal Affairs and

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Communications Minister Suga and Financial Services State Minister Yamamoto.

14:10
Met Yabunaka and Okuda in the presence of advisors Koike and Seko. Afterward met Resources and Energy Agency Director General Mochizuki and others.

15:43
Met former Finance Minister Yosano, followed by US Ambassador to Japan Schieffer. Afterward met Defense Minister Kyuma.

17:02
Met Foreign Minister Aso, METI Minister Amari, MAFF Minister Matsuoka and others, followed by New Komeito deputy head Higashi.

18:10
Attended a new health frontier wise men's conference. Afterward met Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matoba.

19:27
Dined at the Hotel Okura with secretaries and others.

21:23
Returned to his official residence.

4) The comfort women issue "will not have much impact (on bilateral ties)"

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Prime Minister Abe yesterday met with US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) and the two exchanged views ahead of Abe's visit to the United States starting April 26. After the session, Schieffer spoke to the press corps about the so-called "comfort women" issue: "It will not have much of an impact (on US-Japan relations). It was very good (that the prime minister) reaffirmed during a telephone conversation with President Bush that Japan would stand by the Kono Statement."

5) Former LDP Secretary General Kato criticizes US visit by lawmakers on wartime comfort women issue

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Speaking of a group of lawmakers of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who are considering visiting the US in connection with the resolution on the wartime comfort women issue submitted to the US House of Representatives, former party secretary general Koichi Kato yesterday said during a videotaping by Asahi Newstar, a CS broadcaster, "They say that they will explain that neither the

former Japanese Imperial Army nor the state was involved and say that commercial vendors did it. I am concerned that their visit to the US might end up worsening the situation." He was referring to the Council of Diet Members to Consider the Future of Japan and Historical Education, who are planning to visit the US.

6) Government plans to host 2008 G-8 summit, foreign ministerial, finance ministerial in separate places

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YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Japan will host the G-8 summit in 2008. In this regard, the government decided yesterday to hold the G-8 summit, the foreign ministerial, and the finance ministerial in three separate places and on different dates.

In recent G-8 summits, the three conferences have been held on different dates and in different places.

When Japan hosted the 2000 G-8 summit, the summit was held in Okinawa, the foreign ministerial in Miyazaki, and the finance ministerial in Fukuoka.

Hokkaido; Yokohama and Niigata Cities; Kyoto, Osaka, and Hyogo Prefectures; and Okayama and Kagawa Prefectures are carrying out activities to host the 2008 G-8 summit. The Foreign Ministry made firsthand observations. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to make a final decision.

Foreign Minister Taro Aso indicated his view in his meeting on April 17 with Hokkaido Gov. Harumi Takahashi that the decision would be made after the April 22 unified local elections.

7) Kato, Yamasaki to travel to China, ROK from April 26

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Koichi Kato, former secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and Taku Yamasaki, former vice president of the LDP, are to make a six-day trip to China and South Korea starting on April 26. They will meet with key government officials of those two countries and visit Yanji in Jilin Province near the China-North Korea border with the aim of highlighting their stance of placing emphasis on "Asia diplomacy" as well as "dialogue with North Korea."

They will be accompanied by other lawmakers, including House of Representatives member Futada Koji (of the Niwa-Koga faction), who is a member of the Research Council on Asia Diplomacy and Security Vision, chaired by Kato, and who serves as the chief of secretariat for the faction, former Defense Agency Director-General Gen Nakatani (Tanigaki faction), and House of Councilors member Shinya Izumi.

8) Defense Minister Kyuma cancels official duty to visit Nagasaki

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma cancelled yesterday's all his schedules, including a courtesy call by the US Pacific Fleet commander, Adm. Gary Roughead. The reason for his cancellation was to organize the funeral of Itcho Ito, who was shot to death, and to choose a candidate for the Nagasaki city mayoral election in place of Ito, who was running in the race, as an influential lawmaker representing Nagasaki. Before leaving Tokyo, he told reporters: "Since no stalemate in politics is allowed, we must find a candidate taking the place of the mayor sometime today or tomorrow to field in the election."

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Kyuma said that he had asked Ito to run in the summer's House of Councillors election, but Ito had turned down his offer. He lamented Ito's sudden death, saying, "I think he had splendid character and was highly respected. How truly regrettable."

9) Government to strengthen measures to prevent import of firearms: Import records must be engraved on guns and ammunition

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 1) (Full)
April 19, 2007

The government and the ruling camp will strengthen measures to prevent the smuggling of firearms into Japan. Main measures include obligating the engraving of import data, such as the year of import, on firearms and bullets to enable authorities to track down smuggling routes from abroad and smuggling rings. They plan to submit related bills, including an amendment to the Swords and Firearms Control Law, to the current Diet session. They had been pressing ahead with an effort to submit those bills from before. They have judged that it is necessary to strengthen such measures in the wake of the assassination of Nagasaki Mayor Itcho Ito on Apr. 17.

Consolidating domestic laws as a measure to deal with firearms will become necessary in order for Japan to ratify the Firearms Protocol under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which it signed in 2002. At present, 62 countries have signed the protocol. The government will aim at sharing information on such matters as smuggling rings with foreign investigative organizations by quickly ratifying the protocol so the inflow of firearms can be interdicted at the border, an effort that is difficult for Japan to carry out on its own.

The protocol mandates signatory countries to engrave the names of manufacturing countries and manufacturers on firearms and bullets when they are manufactured.

10) Strengthened VIP protection, firearms control now focused on the agenda in response to Nagasaki mayor's assassination

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)
April 19, 2007

In response to the incident in which Nagasaki Mayor Itcho Ito was shot by a gangster and died afterward, the government has begun to consider strengthening firearms control and police protection for important people.

Gun ownership is prohibited in Japan. But the suspect fired a gun, which "he was not allowed to possess" (Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki), at the incumbent mayor during his election campaigning at point-blank range. This is a serious challenge to democracy.

According to statistics by the National Police Agency (NPA), 489 guns were confiscated in 2005. The number has been on the decrease in recent years, but the government analyzes that the decline is attributed to an increase in cases in which organized criminal groups avoid attracting the attention of the police.

The government's Gun Control Promotion Headquarters, composed of cabinet ministers and others, is tasked with working out comprehensive measures to control guns. In a press conference,

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Shiozaki, who heads the taskforce, emphatically said: "We must step up efforts to move ahead with countermeasures, such as strengthened cooperation among the police, customs, and the Japan Coast Guard."

The taskforce, though, holds a meeting only once a year. Some persons point out that the body is turning into a mere shell.

On VIP protection, police authorities select persons who come under police protection. Under National Public Safety Commission's rules, only the prime minister and guests of the state are designated as those under protection. If the NPA director general judges that a

certain person might be exposed to serious harm in terms of life, limb, or assets because of his or her political assertions, the director general will place the person under guard.

Those under 24-hour protection by security police (SP) are only the prime minister, cabinet ministers, and political party leaders. In the case of local government leaders, only when they are blackmailed, they are under police protection. Mayor Ito was not under protection. A Kantei source said, "There was no specific information beforehand."

11) Interview with Eiji Koguma, professor at Keio University: US Constitution deviated from reality

ASAHI (Page 6) (Full)
April 19, 2007

In connection with the incident in which a gunman massacred 32 people on a university campus in the United States, the Asahi Shimbun interviewed Eiji Koguma, who authored the book , Citizens and arming.

-- The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States includes a provision pertaining to gun ownership. The US is in a quite different situation from Japan.

In Japan, since Hideyoshi Toyotomi issued the sword-hunt order (in the late 17th century), only the government's military and police have been allowed to own weapons. In the US, however, citizens in villages carved out of the wilderness fought the American Revolutionary War with their own weapons. This provision is a product of this history.

-- How has the provision in question been interpreted in US society?

The public are split, with some saying that the amendment recognizes individuals' right to own arms but others insisting that restrictions should be placed on individuals having their own arms on the grounds that the provision was designed only to allow militiamen to carry weapons. The National Rifle Association insists, based on the first stance, that placing restrictions is a violation of individuals' right to bear arms.

-- More than 200 years have passed since this amendment was added in 1791, four years after the promulgation of the Constitution.

When the Constitution was created, the US was a farming society, so no thought probably was given to individuals who left the carved-out villages. That was why a line was not drawn between individuals and civil soldiers regarding weapons ownership, I think.

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Until recently, weapons that citizens carried were pistols, at most. Since the 1990s, automatic rifles have been easily available through Internet shopping.

The Constitution no longer matches conditions in American society today, not to mention the advances in weapons technology. Many therefore are calling for restrictions on gun ownership. The issue has become very difficult to resolve because of its linkage to the people's rights and freedom, the basic principles of the US.

12) Blue-ribbon panel to be established on April 25 to study scenarios on the use of the right to collective defense

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

The government yesterday decided to establish a council of experts to study particular cases concerning the right to collective self-defense. By announcing the establishment of the council ahead of Prime Minister Abe's tour of the United States starting on April 26, the government apparently wants to stress a stance of strengthening the Japan-US alliance. The government will convene the

first meeting of the panel after the Golden Week holidays from late April through early May and ask it reach a conclusion by this summer.

Former Ambassador to the United States Shunji Yanai has been informally picked to chair the council. Former Ambassador to Thailand Hisahiko Okazaki, former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Ken Sato, former Joint Staff Council Chairman Tetsuya Nishimoto, University of Tokyo Prof. Shinichi Kitaoka (history of Japanese diplomacy), a former deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, National Defense Academy Professor Emeritus Masamori Sase (international politics), and Komazawa University Prof. Osamu Nishi (specialist on the Constitution) have been informally picked as members. The council is expected to be composed of 10 or so members.

13) Sakhalin 1 next focus of development of natural gas: Japan seeks cooperation from Russia

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Now that Gazprom, Russia's natural gas monopoly, has formally obtained a majority of shares of Sakhalin Energy, a mainstay company involved in the Sakhalin 2 project near Sakhalin, Russia, the focus will shift to the nearby Sakhalin 1 project. Exxon Mobil has signed a tentative contract with China for exports of natural gas from Sakhalin 1. Gazprom is said to have indicated a desire to obtain the right to sell natural gas from the Sakhalin 1 project to Japan and other countries. The Japanese government is working on Exxon to export products to Japan. Chances are that Japan and Russia may seal a tie-up deal over the Sakhalin 1 project.

The Resources and Energy Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has asked Exxon to export liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Japan, but it has not yet received a definite answer. According to an informed source, Gazprom wants to export natural gas to Japan by liquefying products drilled in the Sakhalin 1 project as well, using LNG facilities at the Sakhalin 2 project, which has come under

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its control.

The Resources and Energy Agency this January sought cooperation from Gazprom over exports of natural gas from the Sakhalin 1 project to Japan and conveyed a decision to help its business tie-up with Japan's energy-related company in return. The Russian government has begun applying pressure on Exxon since the end of March, as can be seen in the fact that it has launched an investigation into environmental destruction at the Sakhalin 2 project site, as it did over the Sakhalin 1 project. The battle over natural resources in Sakhalin will likely heat up.

14) DPJ upstaged in Diet

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 19, 2007

The leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) has totally lost its presence in the Diet. The DPJ has allowed a national referendum bill and other critical legislative measures to get through the House of Representatives, and the opposition leader has failed to show his presence in Diet debates. With the Diet entering into the latter stage of its current session, the DPJ wants to take the offensive against Prime Minister Abe and his administration, focusing on a Social Insurance Agency reform bill that will affect pensions. However, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is playing hardball to steer the Diet with its coalition partner, the New Komeito. Meanwhile, DPJ President Ozawa is showing no interest in the Diet. Besides, the DPJ still has no control tower for Diet affairs. Can the DPJ map out a clear-cut strategy toward this summer's election for the House of Councillors?

"As far as I can see, there are now many more LDP members--so many that I want to boil them in soy sauce for tsukudani. The LDP is arrogant and overbearing." With this, Yoshihiko Norota, a DPJ

lawmaker, decried the LDP-led governing coalition over its way of steering the Diet in a plenary sitting of House of Representatives members on April 17 when three education-related bills introduced by the government entered into Diet deliberations.

Three hours before the start of this plenary session in the lower chamber, the DPJ presented counterproposals in a hurry against the government-introduced package of legislative measures. The DPJ had called for the ruling coalition to put off the plenary session, but its proposition was pushed back. The DPJ had planned to present its counterproposals after the Golden Week holidays, but the party came up with the counterproposals earlier than scheduled.

The DPJ's original plan was not to present its counterproposals right away. At first, the DPJ's Diet policy committee did not send in its list of members for special committees and even sketched out a boycott strategy. However, the ruling parties went ahead with Diet deliberations. The DPJ therefore changed its mind and showed up for fear of losing opportunities to challenge the LDP-led government in debate. "An over-easy egg is okay, but an over-easy bill is not." So saying, an executive of the LDP's Diet policy committee mocked the DPJ's wavering strategy.

When the DPJ was led by Katsuya Okada and Seiji Maehara, the party weighed making counterproposals to hit problems in government-drafted bills. Ozawa, now leading the DPJ, declines to face off with the ruling bench. However, the DPJ cannot completely

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leave its counterproposition policy behind in order to show its governing competence. The DPJ has been failing to steer itself well on these two policy courses.

What lies behind that is the DPJ's lack of its control tower. Ozawa is now on a tour of the nation ahead of this summer's House of Councillors election. This week, he is stumping in Tochigi, Kagoshima, and Kumamoto. Naoto Kan, who should be in charge of acting for Ozawa, has been also busy in the run-up to Tokyo's gubernatorial election and Diet by-elections for the House of Councillors.

The DPJ is currently under the troika leadership of Ozawa, Kan, and Yukio Hatoyama, who is the party's secretary general. "Mr. Ozawa has not been in the Diet from the start. Mr. Hatoyama can't control our party in the Diet. Mr. Kan attends meetings but he only complains to the Diet policy committee chairman." With this, one of the DPJ's mid-level lawmakers hit the nail on the head.

The DPJ will also come up with counterproposals to a bill revising the Iraq Special Measures Law and to a bill restructuring the Social Insurance Agency. The DPJ is aiming to reform the agency in particular. The party is thinking of presenting three bills to restore confidence in pensions, thereby trying to make an appeal on its presence.

The question, however, is whether the DPJ can get its counterproposals spotlighted in campaigning for the forthcoming upper house election. The DPJ has to take the lead in steering the Diet with a well-combined setup of counterproposals and showdowns. However, one DPJ lawmaker on the Health, Labor and Welfare Committee of the Diet's lower chamber felt uneasy, saying: "I wonder how far the party leadership is thinking of facing off in a serious manner. That's what I don't know well."

15) Coordination between LDP, New Komeito on revising political funds control law bogs down on issue of office expenses, as LDP reluctant to attach receipts to political fund reports

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
April 19, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and New Komeito Chief Representative Akihiro Ota yesterday agreed to submit a bill amending the Political Funds Control Law to the current session of the Diet. The agreement is aimed to play up the ruling coalition's stance of actively working together on the issue of "politics and money" prior to the

April 22 Upper House by-elections in Okinawa and Fukushima. However, gaps between the two parties remain on the contents of the bill. The question is whether the LDP will accept the New Komeito's proposal that politicians be obliged to attach receipts for office expenses of more than 50,000 yen to political funding reports.

The prime minister last night met separately with LDP Reform Implementation Headquarters Chief Nobuteru Ishihara and New Komeito Political Reform Headquarters Head Junji Azuma and he told them:

"Mr. Ota and I have agreed to submit a bill to amend the Political Fund Control Law to the current Diet session. I want you to make efforts so that the ruling coalition's project team (PT) will have penetrating debate."

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Asked by reporters after his meeting with Abe about his view on the New Komeito's proposal that the bill stipulate that politicians would be required to submit receipts, Ishihara responded: "Our party is not thinking about such a requirement." He added: "As ruling parties, we will settle the issue as we should do. I want to craft a bill that acceptable to the public." Ishihara indicated the possibility that coordination in the ruling camp might be prolonged.

LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa revealed in a press conference on April 9 that the ruling coalition would come up with the outline of a bill before the April 22 Upper House by-elections. A group of junior lawmakers, headed by Yasufumi Tanahashi, and former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki have expressed their approvals for submitting receipts.

However, many in the LDP, including Ishihara, are reluctant to submit receipts. A mid-level lawmaker said: "The office expenses issue has passed over a critical point. Amid the cabinet approval rating on the increase, bringing up the issue will work the other way."

The issue of huge utility expenses by Agriculture Minister Matsuoka's fund management organization has had a major impact on the amendment issue. A senior LDP member said:

"If attaching receipts to political fund reports is decided, this will certainly give the opposition more ammunition to use. We will be put on the defensive at the second half of the current session, which has a long list of important legislation."

16) Report on Upper House Okinawa by-election: Political parties struggling to determine public opinion on bases and Constitution

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Abridged)
April 19, 2007

Yoshimasa Karimata, 57, a candidate backed by opposition parties for the April 22 Upper House by-election, delivered a campaign speech in Ogimi Village in the northern part of Okinawa's main island on April 16.

"Japan has not been embroiled in war over the last 62 years because of Article 9 of its constitution. The Abe administration is trying to revise Article 9. We will not let the government build a new base in the Henoko district."

Karimata's speech elicited huge applause from the audience.

The race is effectively a duel between Aiko Shimajiri, 42, a former Naha assembly member endorsed by the ruling coalition, and Karimata, a former Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) Okinawa chairman. The Karimata camp initially made the expanding social disparity a major campaign issue under the LDP-New Komeito administration.

The reformist camp has traditionally appealed to local anti-base sentiment by playing up base issues in the prefecture. But the defeat of the candidate backed by the opposition camp in the

gubernatorial race last year has made the opposition parties realize that they cannot destroy the thick LDP-New Komeito wall with antiwar and peace slogans alone.

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The major opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) intends to make social disparities and livelihoods major campaign issues in the Upper House election this summer. In fact, the base issue takes ninth place in Karimata's 10-item manifesto, reflecting the opposition camp's policy of not overly highlighting the issue.

But that strategy is being reviewed. Complaints have come from within the Karimata camp about his lack of efforts to address such issues as the elimination from school history textbooks of descriptions on the use of coercion by the former Imperial Japanese Army behind the mass suicides in the closing days of the Battle of Okinawa and the intensifying constitutional debate through Diet deliberations on national referendum legislation.

A Karimata camp election campaign official voiced difficulty making everyday issues campaign issues, saying, "In order to make a clear distinction with our rival, we need more than the social disparity."

Meanwhile, Shimajiri spoke before some 350 supporters in Yaese Town in the southern part of Okinawa on April 16, saying: "I am going to change politics from the kitchen. The kitchen is a treasure house of innovative ideas. We can for instance utilize ideas on household budgets."

It was a gamble for the LDP and the New Komeito to field Shimajiri, a native of Sendai who has served as a city assembly member only for three years. In addition, in the past, she was elected to the Naha city assembly on the Minshuto ticket and left the party only in August 2005. She might stir criticism from conservative forces.

This has promoted the ruling coalition to play up Shimajiri's image in her campaign. In delivering campaign speeches, she now focuses on "the kitchen" as a mother of four, rarely touching on base issues. Although Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Okinawa on April 15, he refrained from referring to constitutional revision, a top priority for his administration.

Another Upper House by-election will take place on April 22 in Fukushima Prefecture, where the Minshuto candidate is ahead. Both the ruling and opposition camps are determined to win the two by-elections, a prelude to the Upper House election this summer.

But given the campaign issues, voter interest in the two by-elections is not necessarily high. For instance, a 34-year-old Naha housewife took this view: "Okinawa has been forced to host US bases throughout the postwar period, so I don't have much interest in national politics. The prime minister and party heads visit the prefecture only when they need our votes."

Okinawa marked a record-low national election voter turnout (54.24%) in the 2004 Upper House election. Whether the prefecture can achieve better than that in the upcoming election remains to be seen.

SCHIEFFER